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ABSTRACT

More women have entered the job market than ever before. With the current socioeconomic changes and with more women attaining education, the number of working women is going to increase rapidly. Most of the working women are of childbearing age and have both preschool and school-age children. While women have to work, it is becoming rather difficult for them to get good substitutes for child rearing. Poor child rearing has been associated with poor child development. The effect of the current child rearing practices has not been questioned in Kenyan society. Its effects should be of major concern not only to parents but also to employers, educators, and the society at large if children are expected to grow normally. Erikson's stages of psychological and cognitive development have been used as a yardstick to illustrate the effect of the current child rearing in Kenya. Kenyan women are being encouraged to enter the job market by current socioeconomic changes and by the education system and this is not expected to change. The role of housemaids, day care centers, and other forms of child rearing will remain dominant. It is important therefore to explore all possible compensatory measures that would limit the possible ill effects associated with current upbringing of children to ensure advantageous and purposed child rearing.
(Author/ABL)

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EFFECTS OF WORKING MOTHERS ON CHILD DEVELOPMENT IN KENYA

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ABSTRACT

More women have entered the job market than ever before. With the current socio-economic changes and with more women attaining education, the number of working women is going to increase rapidly. Most of the working women are in child-bearing age and have both pre-school and school children. While women have to work, it is becoming rather difficult for them to get good substitute for child-rearing. Poor child-rearing has been associated with poor child development. The effect of the current child-rearing practices has not been questioned in our society. Its effects should be a major concern not only to the parents but also to the employers, educators and the society at large if children are expected to grow normally. Eriksons stages of psychological and cognitive development have been used as a yardstick to illustrate the effect of the current child-rearing in Kenya. A few suggestions to improve child-rearing in Kenya are included in the paper.

EFFECTS OF WORKING MOTHERS ON CHILD DEVELOPMENT IN KENYA

Child Rearing in African Traditional Society

Child rearing in Kenya was traditionaly a responsibility of the mother, grandmother and other members of the extended family. Durojaiye (1976) observed that a traditional African child was born into a family where it was completely accepted regardless of the prevailing economic and domestic strains in the family at the time of the child's arrival. In the first two years of life, the child was almost always in the company of the mother experiencing her affection, a sense of belonging and having all her/his needs constantly met. As the child grew, it received informal education from the mother, other members of the extended family and also from the society. Those people were friendly, patient and never too busy for the child's needs. The values of the society were passed to the child by family members and they also socialized the child along the lines accepted by the society. As a result, the child grew trusting the world around him/her, becoming industrious and gaining confidence in herself or

himself as she/he matured and approached independence from parents.

With the rapid socio-economic changes pushing the majority of women into the work-force, the traditional child-rearing practices and the warm relationship between the child, the mother and the other members of the extended family are disappearing rather too fast. While it would be easier to argue that women would be better parents if they remain at home and take care of their children, it is important to understand why in today's society increasing number of women have to work outside their homes.

The Woman as a Worker and a Parent.

The option of working outside the home or not is a luxury that many Kenyan women cannot afford. Very few of them have the pleasure of deciding to work or not to work. Cochran and Bronfenbrenner (1979) outline three reasons why women work:

1. To provide through earned income some degree of independence for themselves and their families.

2. Working outside the home often brings with it regular and frequent social contact with workmates who may become friends and source of information.

3. Some people receive a great deal of intrinsic satisfaction from their jobs.

Together with the above reasons, an increasing number of women in Kenya are being educated and trained for various jobs. As a result, more women are interested in persuing a career. However, Morris and Miller (1980) refering to a recent study indicated that income remains the primary and overriding factor leading women to enter the job market. With consumer price index riding high and the real earnings adjusted for inflation going down, most women in Kenya have to work to supplement their husbands' earnings, and to improve the family purchasing power. Single mothers who are very many in this country have to work to provide sole financial support for their families.

Most of the working women are of child-bearing age and they have pre-school and school children.

Considering the economic realities of raising the children which cannot easily be met by a single salary, women feel they should work to bring some income home. At the midst of the family responsibilities, many women have to struggle to keep a job no matter how intolerable in order to remain financially independent. Because of the pressing needs for more family income, some women entering the job market are forced to take more than one job to keep up with the family bills. For example, a woman might be employed in a certain firm and at the same time run a private business at her spare times. This impairs their efforts in child -rearing because after the hard working day, she becomes too exhausted to spare enough and quality time with her children who need her so much. The woman is also left to handle a feeling of guilt that arise when she fears she has not given enough time to her family, her job and herself because of all these demands on her (Morris and Miller, 1980).

The number of working mothers is going to increase rather than decrease. Faced with a poss-ibility of having to support themselves and their

children someday, may be because of divorce, separation or the death of their partners, more and more women are preparing themselves for employable skills and work experience before they venture into parenthood or even while already in it (Cochran and Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Lack of enough financial support has been known to have a negative effect on both children as well as the parents. Children suffer from basic deprivation which inhibits their development and endanger their survival. When parents can't provide for their children, we have recently witnessed child abuse, spouse battering, suicid or general family violence. Poverty affects the children more than anybody else in our society.

Among other factors, inflation poses special problems for working mothers of pre-school children. Regardless of why women work, Morris and Miller (1980) observed that, the shift of their role has brought many changes in how children are reared, how marriages work and how women see themselves in the society. While they have to work, it is also

becoming very difficult for women to find appropriate substitute to take care of their children when they are at work. Due to inflationary pressure, relatives and friends who would be available for baby-sitting have also taken jobs outside the home to meet their financial commitments. Furthermore many families with working mothers have moved to urban areas where most jobs are available and where life is more conducive for modern living. This means that grandmothers are also not available for baby-sitting. As a result, some children are left by themselves, others are taken to day-care centers but majority of them are left under the care of a housemaid who is employed to take care of family's responsibilities while the mother is at work.

The Role of a Housemaid as a Mother Substitute

Most of the employed housemaids are young illiterate girls or school dropouts who could not

continue with their education for various reasons. Majority of them are under stress either becuase they could not continue with their education or because they are under financial difficulties and they had to take maids job which is not very reputable. It is unfortunate that in most cases mothers do not know the background of the maids to whom they hand-over their responsibilities leave alone knowing where they come from. Sometimes mothers get house-maids through friends or relatives and before they learn enough about them, they have to handover their duties because they are also needed at work the following day. This is not fair not only to the children who will be left under the care of a total stranger but also to the housemaid who will be left juggling the work in a strange environment. Due to the pressure of work and lack of enough experience, the housemaid does the obvious work to please her master or in order to retain her job. Under such circumstances, it is the children's unseen needs that suffer. For example, the house might be kept clean, children might be washed and dressed in clean clothes while they were poorly feel. They might also be

abused if they make the house and their clothes dirty as they play. Children need to be well fed and given enough time and assistance when playing if they are to grow properly. They don't need to be restricted too much as the housemaids tend to do to keep them and their environment clean. Discrediting the work of child-rearing by housemaids, Durojaiye (1976) refering to professor Lambo wrote:

> ..... the traditional pattern has changed because in many cities in Africa the housemaid has replaced the mother. This is apparently an inadequate substitute since these maids are themselves under stress, inadequately prepared for the task of mothering, and usually emotionally immature. Many mothers in African cities need a mother substitute because they go out to work. However, they don't have enough emotional and material resources to adequately compensate for their being away from home (p.21).

Though this child-rearing practice seems to be inevitable in our society, the effects it may have on the child himself, the family and the society at large has not been questioned in our society. The effect of this pattern of upbringing were expressed by Erik Erikson in his description of stages of psychological and cognitive development of a child (Biehler & Snowman 1982). The stages will be used

in this paper as a yardstick to explain the situation relevant to child-rearing in Kenya today.

The first stage of development is from birth to one year. At this stage Erikson says the child learns to trust or mistrust the world around him. "Trust is fostered by consistency, continuity, and sameness of experience" (p. 37). The three elements mentioned above are lacking in todays pattern of child-rearing in Kenya. The mother usually goes back to work after about two months of maternity leave, leaving the baby under the care of the house-maid. Besides taking care of the baby, the house-maid is also responsible of other household chores including washing, cooking and general cleaning to mention a few. The maid has no experience in child-rearing whatsoever. Given the amount of work in the house, the maid's inexperience, and her age, attending the baby's needs may not be a priority except when inevitable and in many cases the maid may mishandle the baby. In the process the mother may notice the neglegency and replace the housemaid or the housemaid may run away in frustrations. Before

the end of this first stage, the mother may employ more than one housemaid each one of them coming with different approach in child-rearing depending on her background and personality. The frequent changes of the housemaids means rapid changes in the way children are handled. The mother is also away from the baby most of the times and when she is home, the way she handles the baby is alo different from the way the maid does. As a result of this inconsistency the child learns to mistrust his environment.

The second stage is between 2 - 3 years. After the child learns either to trust or mistrust his environment, Erikson suggested that the child should be encourages to do what he is able to do for himself in his own pace but with supervision. By so doing, he will develop a sense of autonomy. If peoples are impatient with him and tend to do most of the things for him, he learns to doubt his ability to deal with his environment and hence develop a sense of shame and doubt. Contrary to Erikson's view and that of African tradition that a child should be patiently guided in learning to do some tasks for himself, today's society is in

a hurry to finish one task and move to the next and they cannot stand children on their way. Neither the mother nor the mother substitute is patient enough even to let a child feed himself incase he messes up his clothes. Besides, the maid has to do so much and wants to finish the tasks before her master comes home. In some cases the mother sets a day's routine for the baby and the maid is expected to adhere this it. This gives the child no time to learn and do things for himself. This approach makes a child develop a sense of shame and doubt that he can hardly do even the simple things for himself. That is why most of them have to be fed, dressed and washed even when they are of school age. This is very common in most of the urban homes where there are housemaids.

The third stage is between 4 - 5 years of age. According to Erikson, a child at this age needs to explore and experiment with his environment. If this is allowed and if all his questions are answered as he explores and experiment with their environment, there is a tendancy for the child to become initiative.

But if he is restricted and made to feel his questions and activities are a nuisance, he develops a sense of guilt and become afraid of doing things by himself.

Due to lack of enough space-especially in urban areas and with the fact that the mother wants her house to remain sportless clean, some children are inhibited from exploring and experimenting with their surroundings. Some children are even beaten if they are found handling things they are not supposed to. Due to lack of finance or even knowledge that children need toys and play materials to aid them in development, some parents are not in a position to make or buy those important tool of development to their children. On the other hand the maids might be too busy to attend to the child's questions. Sometimes she may not have enough knowledge to handle some of the questions asked by the child tactfully. Other times she may give misleading answers which might be harmful to the child's development. This kind of experience inhibit the child's initiative and hence hinder proper development.

Stage four is between age 6 - 11 years when a child is entering school and dominated by intellectual curiosity. Erikson's view is that a child at this stage wants to be recognized and praised for his accomplishments. If this is done, a child becomes industrious. If not, he feels inadequate and inferior. Most of the tasks that a child does at this stage relates to what he learns in school. To facilitate learning, he needs support and encouragement both in school and at home. The maid who is with him most of the times is too busy doing other things and also disinsterested in child affairs. Besides, she might be illiterate and therefore not able to assist children in their intellectual matters. To support this inadequacy, Durojaiye (1976) remarked that "The employment of housemaids to look after the children of educated urban dwellers may bring other educational problems" (P.21). Refering to Roger Bastide, Durojaiye further wrote:

> The effect may be that, the children of these educated elite mothers will identify with the traditional, illiterate housemaids. If this happens, the effect on their education may be disastrous. Housemaids who are themselves ineducated cannot be good models for children receiving formal education (p.21).

- After a long day's work the mother is also tired and prone to emotional difficulties due to exhastion. Instead of coming home to attend the child and compensate him for what he might have missed from the mother substitute, she may prefer to keep to herself or to catchup with the remaining household chores without the child's interference. Sometimes the child is not encouraged to do the homework or he may struggle to do it alone without mother's or maid's assistance. As a result, his psychological and educational needs are not met either by the mother or the mother substitute.

The fifth and the last stage in child development according to Erikson is between 12 - 18 years of age. Erikson's view is that the child is approaching independence from parents. His concern at this stage is what kind of a person he is becoming. If the earlier stages of development were adequately taken care of and if the child succeed (as reflected by the reaction of the others) self identity develops. If the child is unable to establish a sense of stability in various aspects of his life, Erikson said that the

danger is role confusion particularly about sexual and occupational identity. This means a child grows to adulthood before he is well adjusted both to his environment and within himself. This is at a stage where some children get confused in life and deviate from society norms. The child may involve himself in bad company, start taking alcohol and drugs and get involved in bad sexual behaviour. This is the time the child's behaviour starts worrying the people concerned but the source of his problems may be traced back to the earlier stages of development. Though there was no clear-cut established relationship between juvenile deliquency and mothers employment, Gordon (1979) observed that absenteeism in school, juvenile deliquency, alcoholism and drug usage among teenagers may be associated with lack of adequate child care and parental supervision in the early teens.

Though the issue and solution of child-rearing in Kenya today is not a simple subject to deal with because of its complexity, it should be a major concern to the parents, employers, educators and to all those who advocate for a better tomorrow for our Kenyan youth. It is clearly seen from the above

discussion that our society is faced with a danger whose consequences have not yet been clearly identified and which may have been blamed on other things. Entering the job market by the Kenyan women is something that is being encouraged by the current socio-economic changes and by our education system and it is not expected to change. The model of a home with the male as the bread-weaner and a housewife and children to support will soon become a minority situation as more women join the labour market. The role of a housemaids, day-care centers, and other forms of child-rearing will therefore remain dominant in this country. It is important therefore to explore all possible compensatory measures that would limit the possible ill-effects associated to the current upbringing of children to ensure advantageous and purposed child-rearing. A few suggestions in improving child-rearing in Kenya are given in the following paragraphs.

Most of the housemaids are either illiterate young girls or primary school dropout who have no

experience in child-rearing. They would therefore not be expected to do a mothering job efficiently without any training. It would be important therefore to train them in child-rearing practices before they assume child-rearing responsibilities. The training would not only equip them with knowledge and skills but it would raise their moral knowing that their role in the society is also recognized. The skills would also help them become better mothers in future and hence raise the standard of child-rearing in this country.

A day-care center is another alternative to child-rearing for working mothers. But many mothers are faced with a problem of finding a realible day-care center even when they have money. The programs in most day-care centers are designed to provide only physical needs of a child and to benefit the working mothers without considering the psychological and emotional interests of a children. Staff: children ratio and physical facilities are not usually adequate and this is not good for child development. Most of the caretakers are also untrained. To improve Day-Care

Centers, employers, educators and society at large should consider Child Care matters to be of direct concern to them and help to influence national policies that would take care of this problem. That would include providing adequate Day-Care Centers, either near the homes of the working mothers or near their areas of work. Employers should also consider subsidizing child-care for their working mothers (on a sliding scale in relation to the family income) as one of the fride benefits needed by both the mother and employer. This would also minimize the need for mothers to be absent from work and hence improve productivity in their work. Employers should also plan to have lunch-time seminars for their women workers to help them balance their work and the family responsibilities. If employers are not able to handle such seminars, they would invite resource people from the organizations concerned with child survival and who would be willing to talk to the working mothers.

Even when housemaids and Day-Care Centers can take the responsibility of child-rearing when mothers are at work, every child needs a special time

with the parents. Mothers should plan to have a quality time with their children everyday and much more over the weekends when they are not working. This would foster warm feelings between the mother and child. She should also take some time to teach skills to children when they are free. Due to the demands on her time and energy, a working mother should also plan to have a number of children she would be able to care for without much strain.

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